Marriage, Family and Aviation

“If we wanted you to have a wife we would have issued you one!”

What are these flying folks like?

The Right Stuff--Wolfe, T

Stamina, guts, fast neural synapses, and old fashioned hell raising

Common characteristics

- Like to control
- Maintain emotional distance
- Mission oriented compartmentalizer
- Systematic and methodical

Contradictions

- Highly intelligent--not intellectually oriented
- Team player--anxiety in close relationships
- Gregarious & extroverted--not really warm
- Many acquaintances--very few close friends
- Appears easy going--despite driven quality
- Conforming-- need novelty & excitement

Spouse personality

- Expressive
- (Daughters) of achievers
- Attracted to men like dad
- Bright
- Achievement oriented
- Educated

Women's Study (McGlohn & King 1996)

- Tend to get married later
- Delay childbirth
- Report fewer stressors associated with family/career conflicts than men
- More women married to other military thus greater stress associated with joint spouse

Why are aviators vulnerable?

- Hide emotions
- Difficulty with close/intimate relationships
- Under stress = poor communication
- Communicate ideas & facts not emotions
- Helpful factors
  - Bright
  - Educated
  - Achievement oriented

Work

- Like to control
- Maintain emotional distance
- Mission oriented compartmentalizer
- Systematic and methodical

Home

- Controlled environment?
- Not conducive to great relationship!
- OK is mission is with spouse/family at home!
- What happens if system is OOC!

What happens when this stuff doesn’t mesh?

STRESS

Relationship Problems

- Dangerous results for aviators
  - Distraction
  - Pilot errors
  - Increased physiological arousal
  - Influence sleep
  - Influence appetite
  - Can be chronic

Let’s throw something else into the mix

- Aviators
- Spouses
- Stress
- CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE!

Concept of marriage

- Next important relationship after childhood
- Needs fulfillment
  - Companionship Emotional Security
  - Parenting Division of Labor
- Life-long..monogamous
- Commitment
- Developmental Relationship

American Society and Marriage

- Changing women's and men's roles
- Success = happiness not length

  - Quality vs. quantity
- No obvious reasons for long term commitment to "work it out"
- Few models or methods for conflict resolution

Marriage and aviation

- Stressors
- PCS
- Careers/commitment to AF
- PME/Masters
- Sex
- Hours
- OWC
- TDY
- Few Supports
- Money

Response to marital stressors

- Accommodate/Resolve = Reduce Stress
- Fail to resolve = Increase Stress

Marriage and Duty Performance

- Raschmann and Patterson (1990)
  - n = 21
  - 35 y/o, Capt, 1700 hours, 2 1/2 discord
  - 90% divorces initiated by wife for:
    - poor communication (authoritarian, overcontrolled)
    - career conflicts
    - TDYS

Prevalence of worry in normal aircrew (Aitken, 1969)

- 20% all pilots worry about flying
- 66% of pilots in squadron with high accident rate worry about flying
- Worry about flying, bereavement, wife and love-life.

So what can we do?

- Aviators
- Spouses
- Stress
- Relationships
- School
- Limited time

Stress Management

Four R's of Stress Management

- Recognize
- Relax
- Reassuring Thinking
- Relate Assertively

What is a stressor?

- *Anything we perceive as a threat*
- *We react to what we perceive*
- *We create our own "stress reaction"*

How does stress affect us?

- *Individual response*
- *Performance curve*
- *Cumulative effects worse than "one big stressor" (i.e.., ops tempo, family tension)*

How do we Recognize Stress?

- Physical
- Emotional
- Behavioral

At first: Sight, smell, hearing improve.
Prolonged stress: Senses get confused.
Blood rushes to brain
Brain function improves
then deteriorate
Jaw clench/Teeth grinding
Salivary glands shut down
Body heats up,
sweat glands go to wo
Breathing gets fast, shallow.
Chest muscles constrict.
Liver desperately
makes sugars
Muscles tense,
tremble
Heart pounds,
blood pressure
soars
Digestion shuts down; stomach
bowels, bladder try to empty
Sex drive decreases
Blood leaves extremiti
Moderate stress: Nerve endings supersensitive
Extreme or prolonged: Nerve endings grow numb

Physical

- Exhaustion
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Recurrent Awakening
- Early morning Rising
- Sweating
- Increased HR
- Change in Appetite
- Indigestion
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

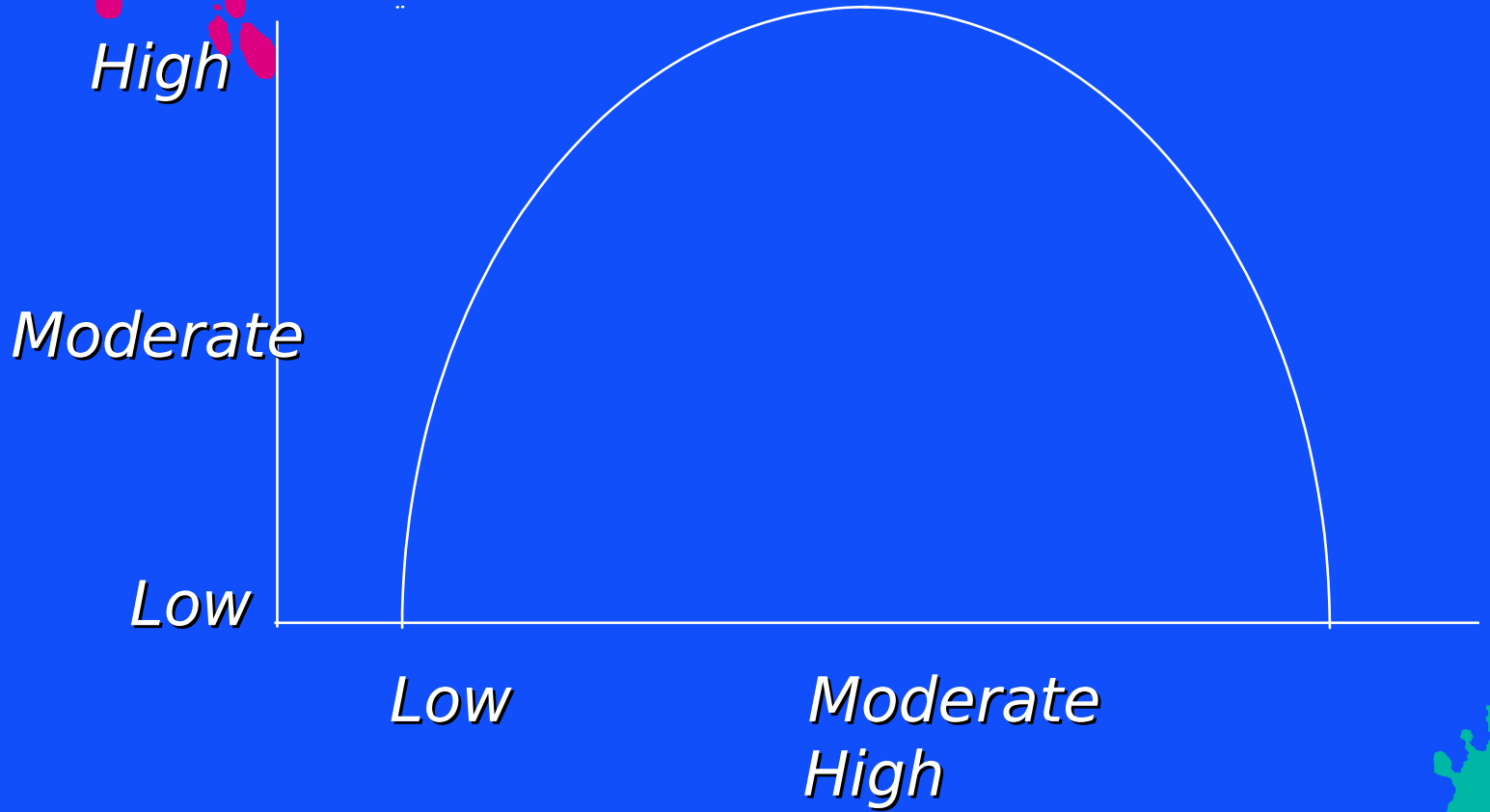
Emotional

- Apathy
- Sad
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Agitated
- Insecure
- Defensive
- Preoccupied
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Deny Problems
- Suspicious
- Guilt
- Anger
- Inflexible
- Work to exhaustion

Behavioral

- Withdrawal
- Neglect Responsibilities
- Alcohol Use
- Tardy
- Poor Appearance
- Yelling
- Traffic Tickets
- Work related withdrawal
- Promiscuity
- Accident prone
- Fights
- Crying
- Hitting

Performance Curve



How do we cope with stress?

- *Negative Strategies*
- *Better Strategies*
- *Best Strategies*

Negative coping strategies

- *Alcohol*
- *Denial*
- *Eating*
- *Fault-finding*
- *Illness*
- *Indulging*
- *Passivity*
- *Revenge*
- *Stubbornness*
- *Tantrums*
- *Withdrawal*
- *Worrying*

Better coping strategies

- Exercise
- Hobbies
- Rest
- Talking
- See a movie
- Video games
- Watching TV

Best coping strategies

- *Diaphragmatic Breathing*
- *Progressive Muscle Relaxation*

Why are these the best?

- *Mimic our bodies natural relaxation response*
- *Can do anywhere*
- *Don't need special equipment*
- *With practice become "automatic"*

Diaphragmatic Breathing

- *Sit in a comfortable position*
- *Take 3 deep breaths*
- *Place one hand on stomach and other on chest*
- *Breathe so only stomach rises and falls*
  - *As inhale: chest still, stomach rises*
  - *As exhale: stomach fall, air escape*
- *Breathe in 1-2-3 and out 3-2-1*

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- *Start with 8 muscle groups*
  - *upper and lower arms*
  - *lower legs*
  - *stomach and abdomen*
  - *chest and breathing*
  - *shoulders*
  - *back of neck*
  - *eyes*
  - *forehead/jaw*

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- *Tense and then release each muscle group*
- *Practice at night initially at onset to sleep but DO NOT FALL ASLEEP!*
- *With continued practice, muscles "learn" to respond automatically*
- *Then move to 4 muscle groups*

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- *4 muscle groups:*
- *CALM Reminder:*
  - *Chest: Breathe slower and deeper*
  - *Arms: Shoulders relaxed*
  - *Legs: Loose and flexible*
  - *Mouth: Jaw drops*
- *Practice daily, quick CALM reminder*
  - *at desk, in cockpit, in car etc.*

Questions?